

LETTERS FROM SARAH BRADFORD (MRS. DANIEL BRADFORD)

Attached to the copy of these letters is a handwritten note by Gershom Bradford of 4701 Reservoir Road, Washington, D.C. to Dr. Peterson:

Dear Dr. Peterson --

I am enclosing a copy of the letter written by Mrs. Daniel Bradford in accordance with our telephone conversation.

I regret not having sufficient time to call you and talk further on the subject of Duxbury's interesting history.

Sincerely

Gershom Bradford

The letters are prefaced by this statement by Gershom Bradford:

Recently through a happy coincidence, I learned of the existence of the following letters, which give a running account of the dismasting, the seven weeks under jury rig, and of her capture by the British ship of the line *Ramilles* on the high seas. The letters were written by the captain's wife, one of the earliest American seafaring women to face the discomforts of small ships and the dangers of lawless seas. Her descendants saved them from generation to generation until they now rest in the possession of Mrs. Herbert H. Hudson of White Plains, New York.

Dear Dr Peterson. - I am enclosing a copy  
of the letters written by Mrs Daniel Bradford  
in accordance with our telephone conversation.

I regret not having sufficient time  
to call on you and talk further on the  
subject of Duxbury's interesting history

Sincerely

Gusman Bradford

Ship Hercules, September 28 (1807)

Dear Zilpah.-

Last Tuesday there was a shocking storm and our ship was dismasted. The storm that I was out in last October was a gentle zephyr to what we experienced last Tuesday. It blew at S.E. and Mr. B. {the master} says it was the heaviest he ever experienced. He thought for one hour to see the masts blow over the sides, but the gale had abated for a few minutes, and I had begun to hope the worst was over, when a sea struck her in the bowsprit and broke that close to the bow, and with that went the foremast, and in a few minutes the mainmast. There was a man in the foretop but he was saved providentially, as well as the rest of us. There was one in the shrouds; he jumped on the deck and lamed himself. The other (the man aloft) came up to windward and Mr. B. got him. The horror of the scene was more than I can express or you imagine, unless you were to experience it, and God grant you never may.

There is a ship coming up with us to see what is the matter. We rock so it makes me write so. I am perfectly well and content and thankful that I am alive. Mr. B. thinks to get into some port of France, the first he can make. They have all worked like bees and have got up two jury masts and sails enough to make her go four knots with a good wind.

If you don't hear from us this some time don't be concerned. We have got provisions and water to last some time and I trust we shall be preserved and again see our native shore.

It was four in the afternoon when we were wrecked. If it had been night they say it would have been impossible to have cleared her. It was almost as dark as night then. They hove over coffee and lightened the ship. The sea broke over her all night and the noise of that and the loose things at her sides was shocking. It seemed to me that she rested almost bottom up. Tell Father Mr. B. did not neglect the ship to take care of me for he never came below but once from eight in the morning till four in the afternoon.

Cherish my sweet Emily {her oldest child} if she is alive and you shall not find an ungrateful sister in Sarah.

The vessel has hove-to to assist us and I send this parcel knowing you will be glad of it. The sea that struck us took the boat from the stern. I suppose the loss of the masts is considerable but I know that will not be held in competition with our lives.

Sarah

Ship Hercules, November 13, 1807

Dear Sister,

It is with pleasure that I write to you from a safe harbour. We have just arrived at Spithead where one of his majesties 74 gun ships has taken us. I expect that you have all been anxious about us and Mother especially. I hope it has not added to her melancholy. When I return I hope to find her well and my lovely Emily. It has been a grief to me that I did not know where Sally and she would be in my absence but I trust to your goodness that you and father and mother will see that they are taken care of. Mr. B. and I regret that we had not offered father and mother our house this winter. How much warmer and more comfortable you would be in that snug warm house than you can be in yours. If it is not too late when you receive this I hope you will take possession of our house. You will have no need of removing anything but bed clothes. You may make use of anything in the house. I can depend upon their being used with care.

We have had a most tedious passage and no words can express what I have undergone with fear. That troublesome companion has stuck close to me ever since we were dismasted. O Zilpah, it was a solemn time with me. Bill (probably the cabin boy) was my intelligencer. He would go to the head of the stairs and bring me word from on deck whether they were all washed overboard. He would say, "Why are you so frightened? Mr. B. is not frightened a bit." I knew that he would not be frightened for I think it may be as truly said of him as ever it was of man that he fears God and has no other fear. How happy for him and for others that he does not lose his composure in the midst of danger. A few minutes before the masts went, I went up the stairs and looked on deck. It looked so dreadful that I had scarce strength left to get back to the cabin. I saw Mr. B. give his orders with as much calmness as at any other time. When I heard the masts go I had not the least idea of living but a few minutes. My strongest sensations were that my sweet Emily and you all would look for our return and that you never would see us. I tried to compose myself with the thought that I should die with my husband. It was out of my power to compose myself. Mr. B. came to the door and told me we should do well, - to take care of myself. It was a cordial to me, but when they came down to lighten the ship and I heard the mates say that they did not know what damage the wreckage had done her bottom for it passed under her, my spirits sank .... If I ever live to get home it will do me good. I shall not easily forget it and many other trials that we have had.

We got on our passage very well for three weeks and then we had head winds all the time for 20 days, heavy winds from Northeast to Southeast. About every 4 or 5 days it would blow so that they were obliged to lay the ship to, and most of the other time could carry no more than two or three close-reeft sails, and we headed the sea all the time. I wonder Mr. B. is alive. I knew no more of the hardships of a seafaring life when I went with him before, than I should in going from Duxbury to Boston, to what I have now. And now I come

to the most vexatious part of my story--12 days ago the Ramilies {H.M. Ship of the Line} boat came on board of the Hercules took Mr. B. and all his papers on board of their ship. After detaining us some time let us proceed. Two days after came to us again and took all our men out but two, and one of them has not been able to get on deck this 5 or 6 weeks--has the rheumatism. And put a prize master and a midshipman and 7 ill-looking fellows on board of us and took us in tow. At first I was pleased. I thought we should soon be on shore. The weather was more moderate though still ahead. She stoppt every American that she saw. They ran one on shore going into the harbour. We were fortunate enough to get in safe tho not owing to the good conduct of the master. He is full of rum the whole time and the sailors would not obey Mr. B. if he told them to do anything. To see such confusion and management as there has been on board since those haughty Englishmen have commanded us, would try the patience of a Job. To see them strut on board of the Hercules and on board of their own ship I dare to say that he hardly dare speak. The two days that they had us in tow in the night the Ramilies took the wind aback and came down upon us. You can have no idea how dreadful it sounded. I expected she would stave us all to pieces. She took the davies and some of the carved work off the stern and broke some spars and away she went, such a huge thing you never saw. We are no more than a long-boat to her. In two days more they said she was a-coming down again. They carried away the tow rope and we went clear. The third time in the evening it was all noise and confusion they said she was a-coming right upon us. The wind blew hard. I thought I should lose my senses with fright. She cleared us and that was all. It was all owing to carelessness--unfeeling monsters--if they had sent us to the bottom I presume they would have tho't no more of it than I should to kill a spider.

We are quarantined but know not for how long we shall be pestered with those Englishmen and have liberty to go on shore, which will be more disagreeable than the detention.

I expect to see the great city of London and then I hope I shall have something to write you that will be more amusing than our disasters, but nothing that you will be more interested in I presume. My love to Mother and Father and all my sisters. I shall write to Lucy and Welthea {her sisters} the first chance.

Your affectionate sister

Sarah

My dear Emily,

I hope you are well. I want to see you very much. I hope you are a good girl and will learn a great deal before I come home. Give my love to Sally. Tell her I shall write her soon. I expect to go to London and shall buy you a pretty doll and I will take care that she has hands and fingers, and tell Sally that I shall buy her something. I expect Aunt Zilpah or Aunt Welthea lives with you. I hope to be home next spring and hope to find you well. Good sweet

BRADFORD FAMILY

6/6

child. From your affectionate mother.

S.B.